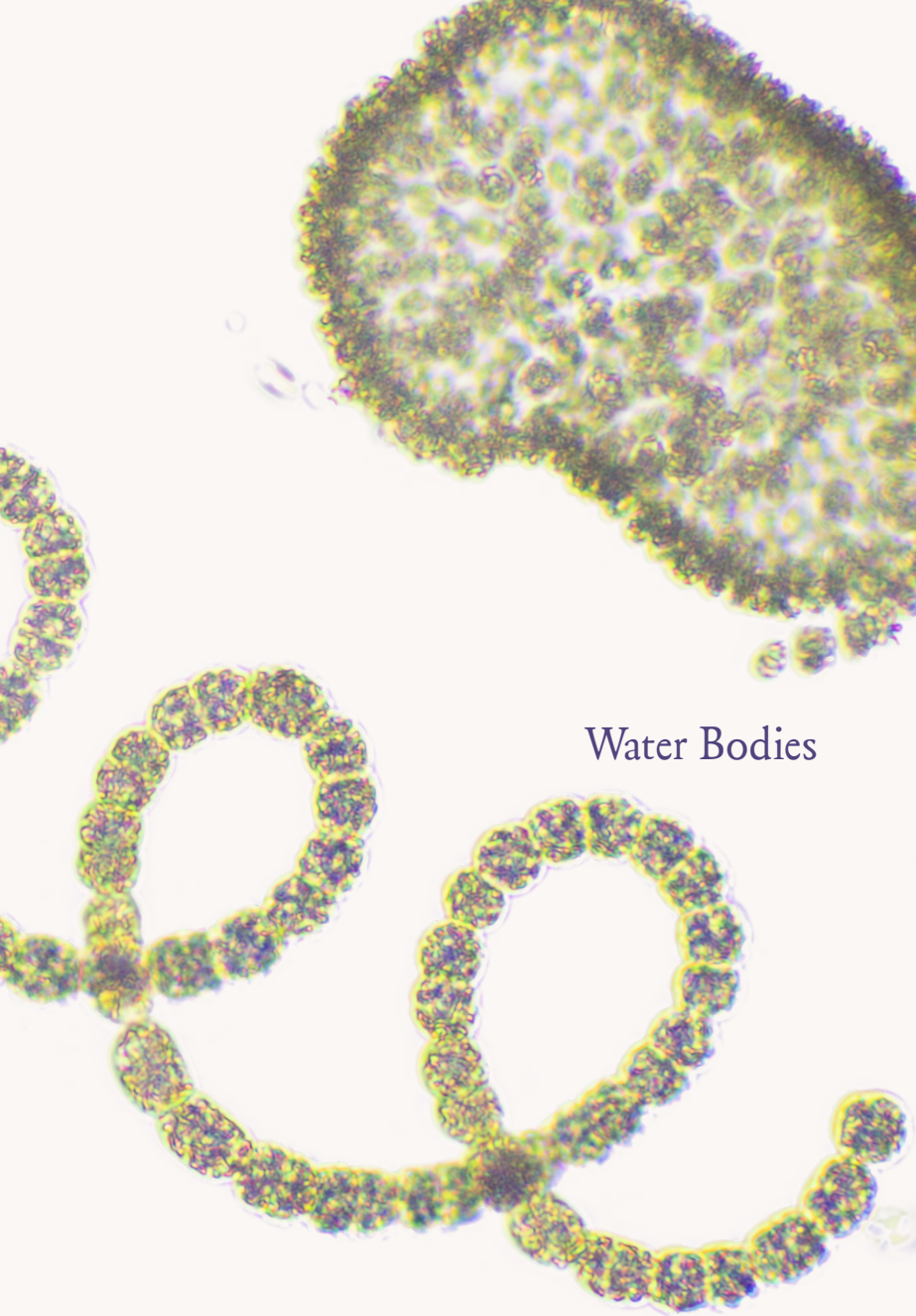
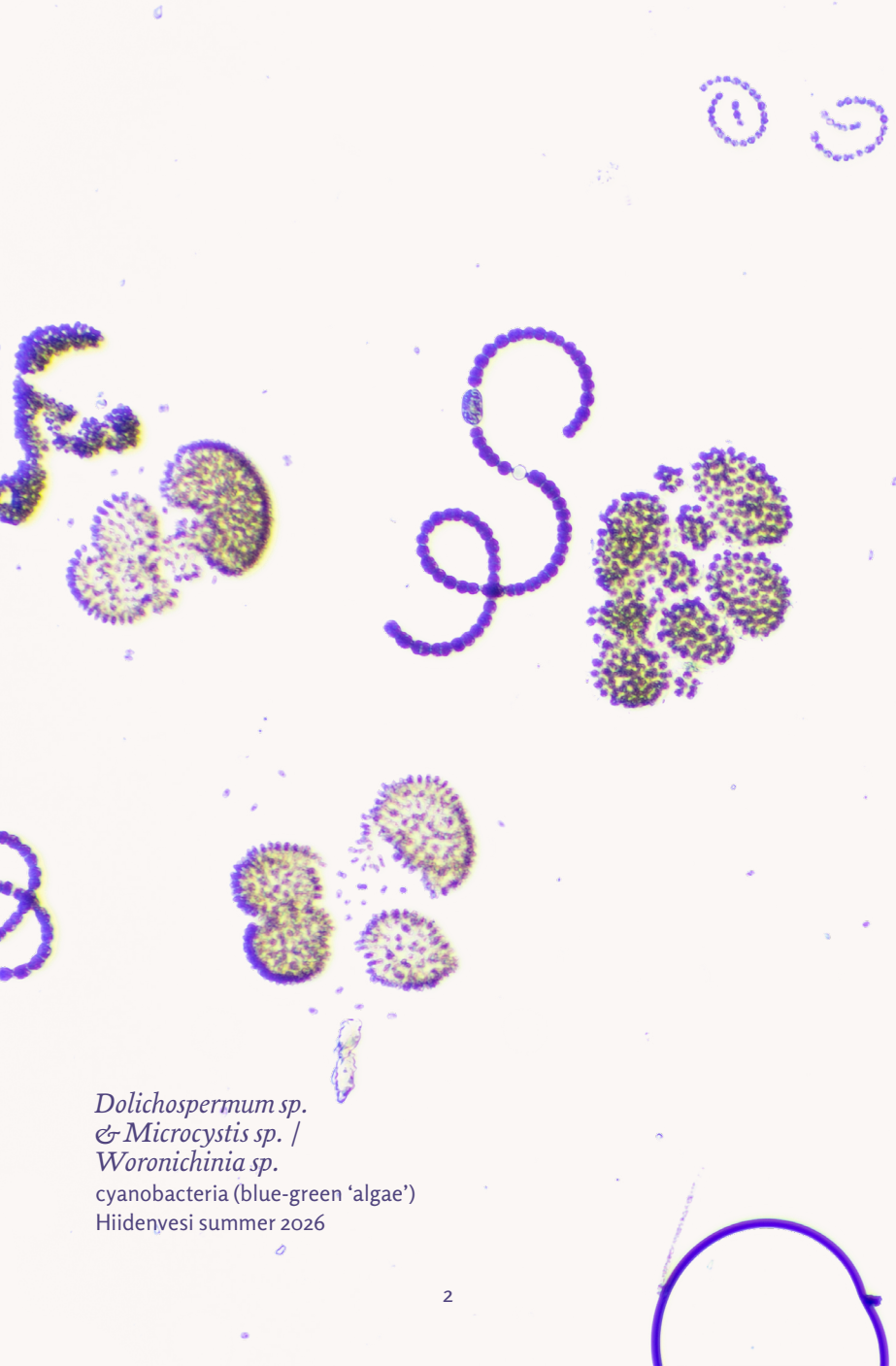


Water Bodies

Noora Sandgren



Dolichospermum sp.
& Microcystis sp. /
Woronichinia sp.
cyanobacteria (blue-green ‘algae’)
Hiidenvesi summer 2026

Prologue

Greetings, Jan 20, 2026

How are You?

I'm writing to you on the human impulse to narrate and share our lives, to reach out across distances. News, experiences, and discussions have always been recorded on leather, wood, metal, papyrus, mythical apples, wood-based paper; and now my fingers seek out the right characters on this electronic sheet. You may imagine my handwriting, how the excited and somewhat frenzied selecting of human words may appear, and how labored it would all be to decipher. You can also observe my letter being drawn upon frail seaweed that dissolves onto dry land at its own pace. I don't know who You are, but I still want to tell you something. I'm writing flashes of the origins of my visual artworks, how they aren't bound as lifeless objects but rather proceed onward in many contexts, as processes. And the minute I try to define where everything began, something crosses out those words, and a throng of options tumbles out.

Speaking about someone else or on behalf of another

is difficult, especially if viewed from afar without being splashed. These images are traces of so many elements. As attempts at acquaintance they may speak of the desire to approach otherness, to consider one's own complicities. A picture without a camera might be a place where the touches of the first snow, my internal vapors, and the rays of the sun leave their shared traces, on the same level. The image is born together, from the shared process of becoming-with.

In February 2023 I am asked if I would like to create an artwork for the route that leads to the Yrjönkatu communal swimming baths. The sounds of water fill my mind and I reply, of course; I'm a diver and a lover of the lensing of water, after all! I must acquaint myself anew with a familiar place.

I imagine how this structure, too, has witnessed years of crisis, all the conceptions of body culture and the processes entailed... Based on my suggestion, the old wall that is meant to house my piece is not painted over; instead the signs of time's passage are allowed to shine through. The artwork emerges, becomes dreamt, gathered, carried day by day in the midst of happening life. In June I tidy my storage spaces, I collect materials. I see my internal waters as an ultrasound, new life is possible, maybe. I investigate the site and the wall's composition, which actually isn't entirely understood.

On the island of Seili, at the Archipelago Research

Institute of the University of Turku, I attend a course for biology students and learn about brackish water, decades-old methodologies, and longitudinal studies. Water samples left over from biologists open up an altered world for me, reached by microscope. A droplet of water contains the snarled feel of a busy metropolis. I return the sample to the sea.

I peer into my depths and as a speck I see the new life that has taken root in me. A period of special hospitality and animality begins. Cyclic life always hangs by a hair – on a multitude. Simultaneously billions of tons of plankton move up and down in the marine water masses, composing the world's largest migration. What could I learn from these primordial beings, abiding and enduring for millions of years? My ecosystem occurs, attaches to shared rhythms.

My cells need salt and certain temperatures, just like single-celled dwellers. My spherical self floating on the windy surface of lake Oulujärvi is as light as a tuft of pollen. I feel the earthy scent of invisible communities in the water. For the first time since my infancy, a fear grips my limbs: What if I sink? At the end of summer, the creature who has existed in my water takes its nascent breath, bequeathed by the algae and plants.

Our everyday life is non-knowing, the relearning of other languages, the practicing of response-ableness. Overcome by the Other, my selfhood expands and suddenly

the childhood of all species feels intimate. The world is not limited outside of the self, as an "environment", but takes place as fellowships and ancient chains of events, an oceanic boundlessness. Night and day merge in the caresses of care, repetitions, laced by beads of sweat. The mélange of things is also unsettling; The invisible world is much more present. In eras like earthquakes, foregone conclusions crumble, and everything is chosen again.

How have You navigated these moments of re-forming, that various renunciations cause? What pictures have gained their genesis, what has fallen away?

A new human creature sinks into sleep, especially in motion; we roam Helsinki's Central Park forest with our pram, gathering water samples in bright baby food jars. We dip our hands into the lower layers of ditches and swampy waters. My responsive body doesn't comprehend the construction site meetings, but draws itself as runoff onto my shirt mid-Power Point presentation. I explain the color gradients of my artwork, how the contours of seemingly separate hues breathe, and it becomes impossible to say where one type ends and another begins.

At the Tvärminne research station, algae researcher Sonja Repetti and I discuss pictures, seaweeds, ways of knowing, engagement in what one loves, complexities. The algae that slip and defy categorization are little-known elements of life, and still they are everywhere around us. We speak about biologist Lynn Margulis,

who studied evolution, and who altered the concept of survival: instead of strength and competition, it is the experts in collaboration and symbiotic relationships who truly subsist.

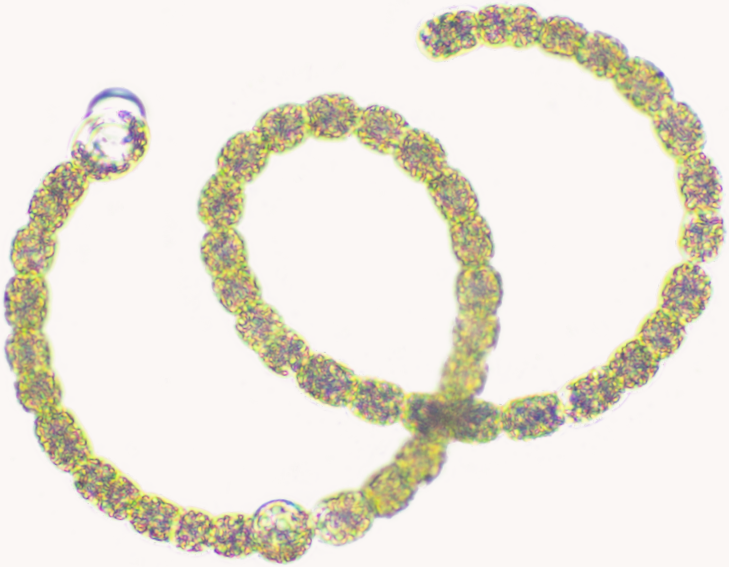
Samples are found in distinctive places that I return to time and again – in water-bodies that also enable renewal for my own anatomy, which acts as nourishment for the Other. Up until this very moment, elements have passed through me and fallen away from my bones to become part of this other being for 512 days. I look at my milk through the microscope, a stirring ball pit. I read up and discover that something is known about this material, but there are also components that remain mysteries. Invisible consctructs, building one on the others, are in every direction. A heading appears: "We Are All Mothers".

How do You experience this, who or what do you nurture, or what do you support, what supports you?

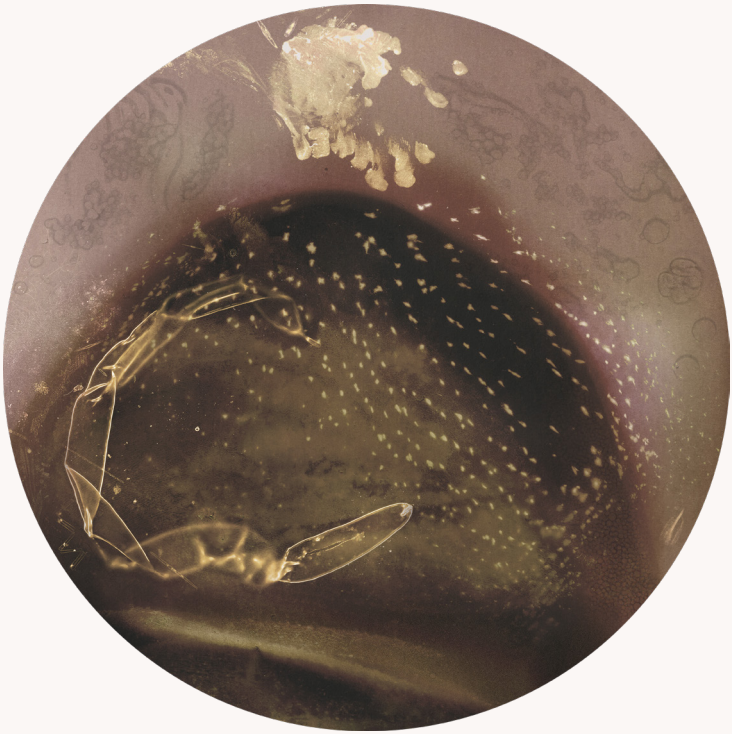
I gaze at the trail of a raindrop; from how far did you come here? Who are the microscopic somebodies who made this snowflake form and fall?

P.S. The other, tangible version of this publication contains a text from Hanna Weselius and algae reseracher Sonja repetti. The release can be found in the book shop of the Helsinki Art Museum (HAM) in 2026, and its profits will all be directed in full toward nature conservation.

The *Water Bodies* photographic work can be experienced in the heart of Helsinki, on the old brick wall of the corridor leading into the classic Yrjönkatu swimming hall. The artwork is composed of six round 167cm photo compilations, burned onto glass, and this present publication. The images combine diverse materialities, traces, and participants, all mixing together organically. The names of the microorganisms identified through microscopic image analysis are researchers' estimates, based on photographs that are not always precise. Visual identification work is a challenging form of interpretation that requires contextual information and microscopy, such as comparing various size scales.



VERTIGO



Cameraless photograph, drawn by sun (20 min) containing breast imprint (20 min), in the Hiidenvesi home garden, in the hot summer sun. The collage also consists of an action painting photograph with milk, microscopic images of milk, and with planktons, a child's first drawing and physical impressions with blueberry pigment.

VERTIGO

Water samples from the piers of the island of Örö, collected with a plankton net (30 µm), and from the small rock pools of Harakka island's shore cliffs with glass jars:

Anabaena sp.
filamentous cyanobacteria (blue-green 'algae')

Nostoc sp.
filamentous cyanobacteria (blue-green 'algae')

Leptolyngbya nodulosa
filamentous cyanobacteria (blue-green 'algae'). Special trait: nodules occurring inside the filaments

Pseudo-nitzschia sp.
diatom

Gyrosigma sp. / Pleurosigma
diatom

Melosira sp.
diatom

Cylindrotheca closterium
diatom

Baccillaria sp.
diatom

Spirogyra sp.
green alga

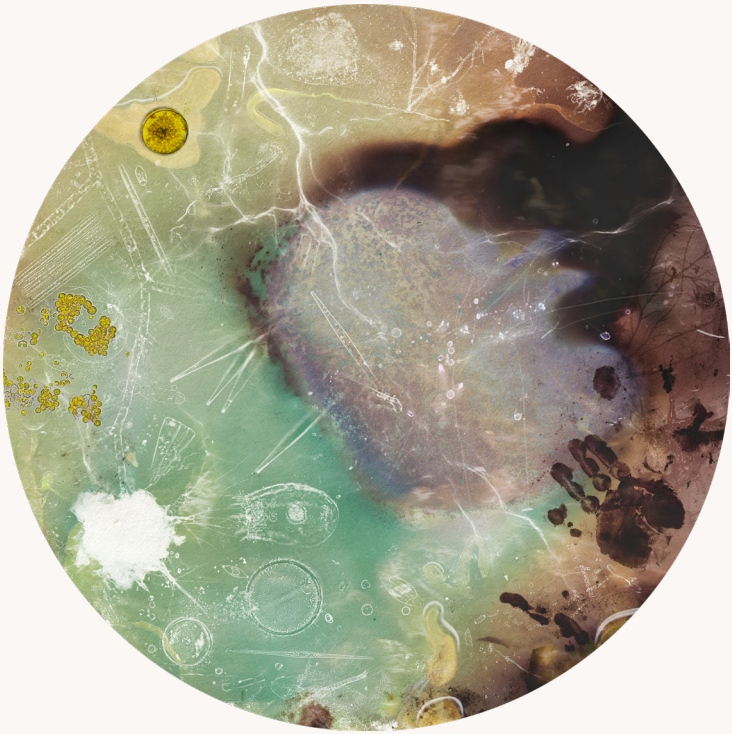
Smaller green spiral-shaped organisms are green algae, or single-celled flagellates of the *Euglena* genus (often found in freshwater).

Euglena viridis,
euglenid alga

Rotifer

Lecane / Synchaeta sp.
rotifer

TVÄRMINNE



Cameraless photograph, drawn by sun and weather called Dialogue (30 min) containing my physical impression, traces of breath, July heat on shore cliffs, sounds of seabirds landing on the water, the buzzing of bees among clovers. Created at the Tvärminne research station. Collage consists of also scanned images of bladderwrack and seawater collected by wading as well as microscopic images with planktons.

TVÄRMINNE

Seawater samples from the pier, from a nearby beach, from a seashore cove, collected with a plankton net (25 µm):

Cyanobacteria
(blue-green 'algae')

Woronichinia spp.
cyanobacteria
(blue-green 'algae')

Skeletonema sp.
diatom

Melosira (*arctica?*)
diatom

Coscinodiscus spp.
diatom

Achnanthes spp.
diatom (triangular)

Licmophora spp.
diatom

Thalassionema spp.
diatom

Nitzschia spp.
diatom

Coscinodiscus /
Actinocyclus sp.
diatom

Cryptophyte

Gymnodinium spp.
dinoflagellate

Vorticella sp.
ciliate

Calanoid copepod larva

Copepod

Balanus-naplius
crustacean larva

Podon spp.
predator water flea

Keratella cruciformis
eichwaldii
rotifer

And: species representing biodiversity of the Baltic Sea, chosen from the Finnish Environmental Institute's FINMARI phytoplankton collection's Tvärminne duplicates.

The archive, which catalogues about 100 phytoplankton species strains, has been cared for more than 30 years in climate chambers that represent their ideal growth temperatures (either 4 or 16 °C). Long-term carers in Tvärminne have been senior laboratory technician Mervi Sjöblom and laboratory technician Kia Rautava. Original samples collection by Guy & Seija Hällfors, Anke Kremp, Päivi Hakanen, and Conny Sjöqvist.

Monoraphidium sp.
TZS 205/TV70
Green algae

Auxenochlorella pyrenoidoisa
TZS 206/TV216
Green algae

Chrysotila roscoffensis
TZS 232/CRF 1502
Coccolithophorid

Rhodomonas marina
TZS 67/Crypto07-B1
Cryptophyte

Diacronema lutheri
TZS 204/TV 3
Haptophyte

Rhinomonas nottbeckii
TZS 91/Crypto07-B3
Cryptophyte

Levanderina fissa
TZS 190/GFL1103
Dinoflagellate

Kryptoperidinium foliaceum
TZS 154/KFF 1002
Dinoflagellate

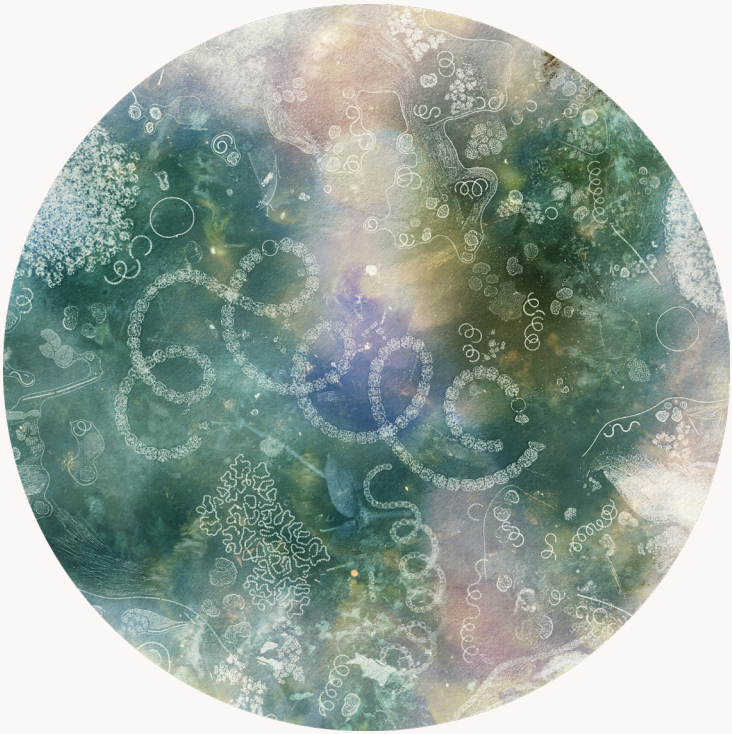
Alexandrium ostenfeldii
TZS 95/AOBy1101
Dinoflagellate

Phaeodactylum tricornutum
TZS 208/TV335
Diatom

Skeletonema marinoi
C1407
Diatom

Synecchococcus sp.
TZS 230/TV65
cyanobacterium
(blue green 'algae')

HIIDENVESI, LOHJA



Cameraless photograph, drawn by sun and weather called Dialogue (30 min) contains my physical impression, traces of breath, springtime in the Hiidenvesi home garden. The collage also contains flatbed scanner images of plants and microscopic images with planktons.

HIIDENVESI, LOHJA

Water samples collected from a swimming spot with a plankton net (30 µm) in summer and early autumn, in calm and stormy weather conditions:

Woronichinia sp. / Microcystis sp.
cyanobacteria

Dolichospermum sp.
cyanobacteria

Anabaena / Dolichospermum / Nostoc sp.
filamentous cyanobacteria

Aphanizomenon sp.
cyanobacteria

Microcystis sp.
cyanobacteria / *Oocystis sp.*

colony of green algae

Ulnaria
diatom

Nitzschia
diatom

Closteriopsis / Ulnaria sp.
diatom

Navicula sp.
diatom

Euglena viridis
single-celled flagellate, perhaps having swallowed a section of blue-green algae

Paramecium bursaria
single-celled flagellate, known for its symbiotic relationship with green algae

Cyclopoidi copepodi
copepod

Lemna minor
common duckweed

Wolffia arrhiza
rootless duckweed

Rhizoclonium sp.
filamentous green algae

Unidentified algae or fungus

Genus belonging to microscopic filamentous red algae

Filamentous brown or green algae

Pine pollen grains

OULUJÄRVI

Cameraless photograph, drawn by sun and weather called Dialogue (30 min) created on the shore of lake Oulujärvi in Paltamo, contains my physical impressions and traces of breath, hair blown about by the wind, a calm evening of a hot day, midsummer. The collage also contains cameraless photograph with marks on light-sensitive paper, created by the organisms and the heat in the compost of my accommodation over five days as well as microscopic images with planktons.

OULUJÄRVI

Water samples collected in midsummer from the beach of Meteli-Seis cultural space in Paltamo, with a plankton net (30 µm):

Asterionella sp.
diatom

Bosmina
water flea

Staurastrum sp.
green algae (desmid)

Copepoda
copepod

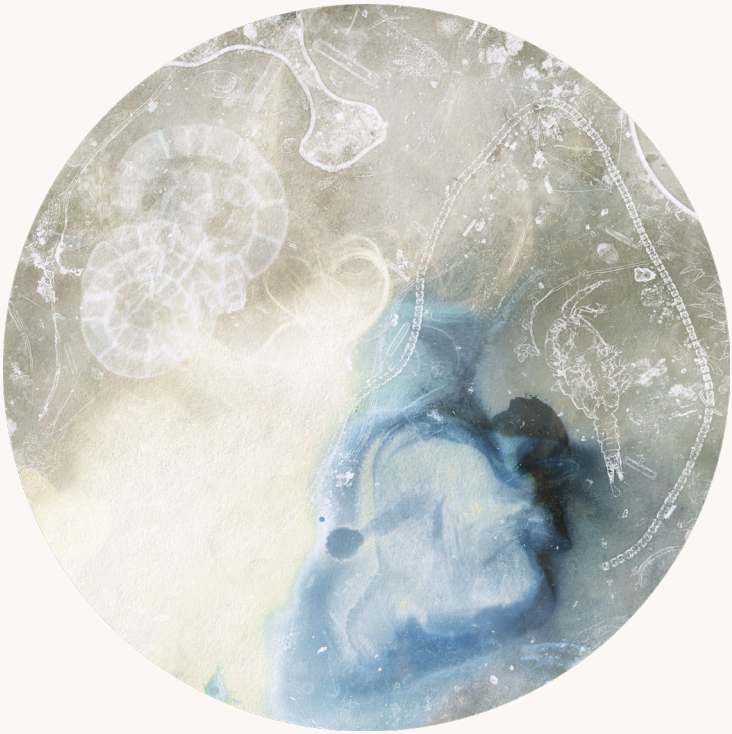
Colony of blue-green algae or green algae, and dead seaweed i.e. detritus, algae bands

Researcher's note:
Most of the algae and plankton specimens in these images were deceased at the time of sampling. That is why they are mostly transparent. This is common in plankton samples. That is, most plants and animals collected with the net are actually just dead plankton material floating toward the bottom of the water.

Their flexibility, adaptability, and ability to respond to changes both as individuals and as populations over multiple generations. Their tenacity, the way they find ways to survive and endure. Their unruliness, their refusal to conform to our plans and expectations of them.

– Sonja Repetti

FOREST OF HELSINKI'S CENTRAL PARK, AREA OF RUSKEASUO AND LAAKSO



Cameraless photograph, drawn by sun and weather called Dialogue (30 min) containing the weight of my head, trace of breath, sweat on a sunny day. Created in the area of my old demolished school (Lehtikuusentie), a region overtaken by plants. The collage also contains microscopic images with planktons.

FOREST OF HELSINKI'S CENTRAL PARK, AREA OF RUSKEASUO AND LAAKSO

Water samples collected from two ditches and three swampy waterways without a plankton net in spring and summer:

Anabaena / Aphanizomenon spp.
filamentous cyanobacteria (blue-green 'algae')

Caloneis sp.
diatom

Pinnularia sp.
diatom

Trachelomonas sp.
euglenoid alga

Vorticella sp.
ciliate

Ciliata
ciliate

Brachionus plicatilis
rotifer

Cycpoiɔi copepoɔ
copepod

A piece of some daphnia's armor

Perhaps micro plastic

Planarian-esque flatworm or other water organism

Let's imagine what ɔoes it mean to be small?
How are the rules of life, physics, ɔifferent?
– Sonja Repetti

KILPISJÄRVI

Cameraless photograph, drawn by sun and weather called Dialogue (30 min) created on the beach of the Kilpisjärvi biological research station contains races of breath, raindrops, tears, autumn chill, sounds of water flowing everywhere. The collage also contains drawings with aerial microbes based on microscopic images and gathered samples.

KILPISJÄRVI

Microbe samples from lake Kilpisjärvi in Sápmi, between Sáná and Jiehkáš, with a Helikite from 210 meters*. I searched for images based on a list of organisms, gained by DNA analysis I approached their characteristics by drawing, informed by special micro-organisms called extremophiles that are adapted to extreme conditions such as freezing cold temperatures:

Penicillium aspergillus

Arthrobacteria ozyrae and humincola

Cladosporium pseudochalasporoides

Micrococcus aloeverae

Subtercola vilae / Subtercola boreus

Micrococcus antarcticus

*High Altitude Bioprospecting group's fieldwork, the Bioart Society's research residency in Kilpisjärvi, 2019. We have continued the processing of field materials with a smaller collective, together with Melissa Grant, Heidi Pietarinen, and Anne Yoncha. I also returned to our research at the ARS Bioarctica residency in 2022 in Kilpisjärvi.

Thank you to all fellow travelers

Firstly, I bow in gratitude to all creatures, big and small, who supported this creative process! Then, thank you in no particular order: algae researcher Sonja Repetti from the University of Helsinki's zoological research station in Tvärminne; she helped me with handling the collected samples, with microscopy, and with image identification. She told me about the FINMARI phytoplankton archive, and chose certain strains to be included in the artwork as examples of biodiversity. We had many discussions about microalgae, art, and science, we became friends. Sonja also invited colleagues of hers to join the identification work: plankton specialists Tjardo Stoffers and Catharina Uth. Curator-researcher Taru Elfving connected me with the island of Seili via the Contemporary Art Archipelago, and supported my work with great conversations. Station manager for the Archipleago Sea research unit, Jari Hänninen of the University of Turku's biodiversity research department, took me along with some junior biologists on his brackish water teaching course on Seili in 2023. He taught me and helped with identification. Special researcher Katja Mäkinen from the same department also helped with my plankton ponderings. Ilppo Vuorinen, board member of the Sakari Alhopuro Foundation, professor emeritus, exchanged ideas with me and helped with identification. Biologists Pekka Paaer and Erkki Makkonen from the Harakka nature center organized a field day in nature for third-graders in June 2025, which I also attended. We studied the lives of plankton throughout the different seasons, preparing samples, and identifying tiny life with microscopy. Biochemist Melissa Grant helped with thoughts on extremophile microbes, and led our work with microbe sampling in the multidisciplinary High Altitude Bioprospecting working group. The work was done in 2019 at the University of Helsinki's Kilpisjärvi research station and surrounding areas through the Bioart Society's residency "Field_Notes The Heavens"; and in 2022 when I returned to the ARS Bioarctica residency. Samuli Homanen accompanied me through the entire

process of this work and these lives. He was a force of nature in handling the visual materials, preparing the multi-layered collages, and in countless other ways. Huima Sandgren took part in and directed the work process. Ritva Kivikkokangas, Eija and other Homanen, and Venla Sandgren all helped with childcare and fed us well. Lennart Sandgren transported all sorts of items and carried heavy glassware sketches from ground level to the work room. Eeva Hannula and Kastehelmi Korpijaakko helped me with their precise comments on word choice; KK and Kerttu Malinen made the hanging pictures of the artworks. Hanna Weselius promised to be a writer in the printed publication. Katri Astala edited the publications to represent the contents. Laura Böök and Kasper Salonen translated the texts with a sensitive eye into Swedish and English respectively. The art curator for the Helsinki Art Museum (HAM), Paula Korte was a fantastic supporter and encourager of wild ideas throughout the artistic process. Thank you to Rakla and Itä-Helsingin Lasi. Thank you to the Helsinki Art Museum for making this artwork possible.

Noora Sandgren

Water Bodies, 2026
Yrjönkatu 21 b, 00100 Helsinki

Publication available for download
https://www.hamhelsinki.fi/en/sculptures/water-bodies/

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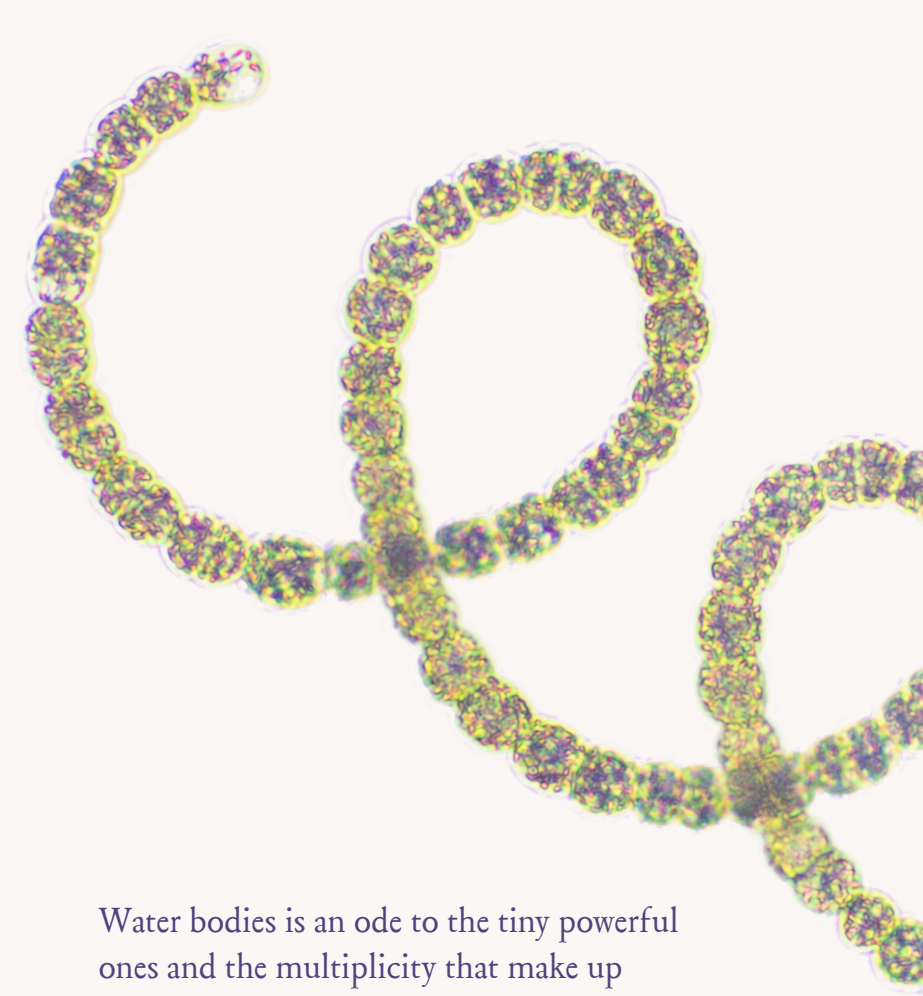

Water bodies is an ode to the tiny powerful ones and the multiplicity that make up each of us. Cyanobacteria were the first to oxygenate the planet, now we can thank algae for every breath we inhale. The same planetary water that flows through our bodies connects us all. Floating in the water, we recognize our strength and are renewed as a part of a wider aquatic network.